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The Need of Nation-Wide
Effort in Wild Life
Conservation

BY

C. GORDON HEWITT, F.R.S.C., C.M.Z.S.
Consulting Zoologist, Ottawa




Reprinted from
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MOUNTAIN SHEEP, VERMILION LAKE, NEAR BANFF, ALTA.

Photo, Courtesy Mr. Dan McCowan



RAMS ON SAWBACK RANGE, NEAR BANFF, ALTA.

Photo, Courtesy Mr. Dan McCowan

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"Wild Life; its Conservation and Protection"
of the Commission of Conservation

OTTAWA — 1919

The Need of Nation-wide Effort in Wild Life Conservation

BY

C. GORDON HEWITT

Consulting Zoologist

THIS National Conference marks an epoch in the history of the movement for the conservation of wild life in the Dominion. Convoked, as it has been, by the Commission of Conservation, with the co-operation of the Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection, it represents the first occasion on which an endeavour has been made officially to bring together those who, through their official duties or public or private interests, are concerned in the protection of our game and fur-bearing animals and wild life generally. All to whom our wild life has any significance have been invited: officials of Dominion and Provincial Governments, representatives of sportsmen's and game protective associations, of the fur-trading companies and of the railways. And the international significance of the problem that we are to discuss is evidenced by the presence of those of our friends and co-workers from the United States who have accepted our invitation.

National
Responsibility

During the last decade there has been in Canada an awakening to the fact that, of all our natural resources, the wild life was the most sensitive to human interference, and there has been a realization of the responsibility that rests upon our shoulders as trustees of the greater portion of what remains of the big game animals, of the breeding grounds of the wild fowl and of the most valuable fur-bearers of this continent. The manner in which the wild life over most of the United States has suffered through lack of adequate protection has furnished an object lesson that Canadians have not been slow to learn; and, while wanton destruction and excessive and unwise killing have taken place throughout Canada, our comparatively small population has not depleted our wild life so well favoured in haunts by Nature, and we are still fortunate in possessing a fair proportion of our original stock of game and fur-bearing animals, well distributed over the country. We have convened for the purpose of determining the best methods by which we can con-

serve our wild life for the use and enjoyment of the people of to-day and of the future.

Before we commence our discussions, I should like to emphasize two points, which are vitally important in their bearing on this subject, namely, the desirability of the greatest degree of co-operation, and the necessity of foresight.

Delay may mean
Extermination

Taking the last point first, why should we not now resolve to use that faculty which distinguishes us from our fellow creatures and exercise our reason, which should make us provident? In the past it has been almost an invariable rule to wait until serious depletion of game animals has taken place before instituting protective measures which, had they been in effect earlier, would have prevented such depletion. Why should we continue to be so lacking in foresight, and of those attributes that make a nation progressive, as to be unwilling to provide against contingencies that we know from experience will occur? Conservation is practical foresight. No natural resource needs the application of greater foresight for its conservation than our wild life, for it cannot be replaced once it is destroyed, and its destruction can only be avoided by wise prevision. Let us, therefore, resolve to look ahead of the present requirements, and plan with our eyes on the future.

But the chief object of this conference is to secure as great a degree of co-operation as possible, in order to further the objects we all have in view. A significant change has taken place in our attitude towards wild life. Formerly, game laws were framed more with an eye to human advantage than for the benefit of the wild life. Our wild life resources were regarded as a convenient and easy source of revenue, and the issuing of game licenses was the principal function of the game officer; the same attitude of mind existed in regard to our forest resources, which were regarded as a valuable source of public revenue, in the shape of licenses and stumpage fees, and not as an economic asset requiring wise conservation. But, when the limits of the, so-called, 'inexhaustible' come within the range of our perception, then the instinct of self-preservation comes into play, and we hasten to make such amends as may be possible by endeavouring to save what remains. The true game officer to-day is more concerned in protecting such game as remains than in issuing licenses for its destruction, and, if we are to retain our game resources, their conservation must necessarily constitute the main function of the game officer; he must be truly a game guardian or warden.

This broader conception of the significance of our wild life and of our attitude towards it has, in turn, brought about a greater sense of our responsibility with regard to the future, and a realization of the fact that the conservation of wild life is not a matter which any one province, state or territory can undertake alone, but that its successful prosecution demands neighbourly co-operation and mutual assistance. The extent of our success in protecting our wild life will depend upon the degree of our co-operation.

In every sphere of activity the spirit of co-operation is growing; in industrial labour, agricultural production or international conduct, co-operation is replacing separate effort. Similarly, in conserving our wild life we are appreciating the necessity of co-operation. So long as our migratory birds were subject to excessive destruction during their winter sojourn in the south and their spring migration northward, our effort to protect them in their breeding grounds was likely to prove unsuccessful altruism; the conservation of these birds demanded international action, and now we are endeavouring by mutual co-operation to protect them. This conference will afford an opportunity of discussing the means whereby we may co-operate in this problem to the best advantage.

Indeed, there are few phases of wild life conservation which cannot be promoted with a much greater degree of success by mutual co-operation between governments than by individual effort. In the regulation of the fur trade, which we propose to discuss, the enforcement of the best laws that a government can devise may be seriously hampered by the limitations that provincial or national boundaries place upon the jurisdiction of such governments. The same difficulty is met where contiguous governments have different policies; for example, where a provincial government, such as that of Saskatchewan or New Brunswick, prohibits the sale of game, and an adjacent province permits it; the absence of uniformity in policy leads to infractions of the law and trouble in enforcing it. While it is too much to expect uniformity in all cases, it cannot be denied that a much greater degree of co-operation than exists at present can be secured, and we believe that the best mode of obtaining such co-operation is by such a conference as this.

The migratory tendencies of most forms of wild life annul the effect of provincial or national boundaries, and the results may be for good or for evil; a territory carrying on a wise protective policy with regard to its game or fur-bearing animals will bring about an overflow into the more depleted

Co-operation in
Protection

Predatory
Animals

contiguous areas; or an area in which an ineffectual policy for the control of predatory animals will serve as a source of supply to neighbouring territory. For good or for evil, contiguity has an effect on the wild life. In the control of predatory animals it is now obvious that complete success can only be obtained by co-operative effort.

**Canada Protects
its Wild Life**

There is abroad in Canada an impression that the Dominion Government concerns itself little, if at all, with the actual protection of wild life. This impression may have been justified by apparent inactivity in former years: it is not justified to-day, and the proceedings of this conference afford confirmation of the fact. While the Dominion Government has left to the provinces the protection of the game, fur-bearing animals, and other wild life within their respective territories, it is nevertheless responsible for the protection of the wild life over an enormous portion of Canada, namely, the Northwest Territories, Yukon Territory, and in the Dominion parks. In order to carry out our national obligations with respect to the treaty with the United States for the protection of migratory birds, it has also assumed the guardianship of our migratory birds; this is being undertaken with the practical co-operation of the Provincial governments. The legislation governing these matters is administered by the Minister of the Interior. In order to supervise the enforcement of this legislation, and to advise on such matters affecting the conservation of wild life as might be referred to the Government, there was appointed, two years ago, on the recommendation of the Minister of the Interior, an Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection, which is composed of a representative from each of the departments concerned in wild life conservation, namely the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Mines (Geological Survey), and Indian Affairs, and the Commission of Conservation. The chief activities of this Advisory Board, up to the present, have been the drafting of the legislation under the Migratory Birds Treaty and the revision of the Northwest Game Act.

**Migratory Bird
Protection**

The policy adopted in respect to the protection of migratory birds serves to illustrate two points that I should like to bring out: First, the possibilities in the way of co-operation between the Dominion and Provincial governments; and, second, the useful functions of our Advisory Board as an instrument for bringing about or facilitating co-operation between the Dominion and Provincial governments, inter-provincial or international co-operation, all of which, as we cannot insist too often, are



YOUNG ANTELOPE IN BUFFALO PARK, WAINWRIGHT, ALTA.

Photo, Courtesy Dominion Parks Branch



BUFFALO BULL, ROCKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK, BANFF, ALTA.

Photo, Courtesy Mr. Dan McCowan

essential to any policy for conserving our Canadian wild life. In regard to the first of these points, the government's policy in the administration of the legislation carrying out the Migratory Birds treaty is to rely on the provincial governments, so far as may be possible, for the enforcement of the provisions of the treaty within their respective territories. With this end in view most of the Provincial governments have already amended their game laws to conform with the provisions of the treaty. Where assistance is necessary to secure the adequate enforcement of the regulations, it is intended to furnish such assistance; and where it may be necessary for the Dominion Government to enforce the regulations under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, owing to the failure of a Provincial government to do so, the Dominion Government will live up to its obligations under the treaty, which is by no means a 'scrap of paper', but the most far-reaching measure that has been yet put into operation for the preservation of our valuable bird life. A great responsibility rests upon the Dominion Government in this matter, inasmuch as it is solely responsible for the enforcement of the regulations in the Northwest Territories, which now constitute, perhaps, the chief breeding grounds of the greatest number of the migratory birds of this continent.

Revision of
Northwest
Game Act

It may not be out of place to discuss as briefly as possible the conservation of the game, fur-bearing animals and wild life of the Northwest Territories, on which subject I have addressed the Commission of Conservation at previous annual meetings. The Commission recommended the revision of the Northwest Game Act in 1916, and that revision was subsequently undertaken by the Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection, a new Act being passed in 1917. The new Northwest Game Act, and the Regulations passed thereunder, have two main features: First, the needs of the wild life in the Northwest Territories are more adequately satisfied; and, second, the fur resources receive a greater degree of protection by the institution of a licensing system for trappers and traders, thus providing a safeguard against exploitation by unscrupulous individuals or companies. The Canadian people generally fail to realize, chiefly because they lack the information upon which to form an opinion or do not give the subject a thought, what an immense economic asset the wild life, and particularly the fur-bearing animals, of the Northwest Territories constitute. Reliable statistics of the fur production of these vast territories are unavailable, and, in passing, may I say that we hope that one of the results of this conference will be the development of a scheme for securing reliable

statistics of one of the country's chief natural resources, the resource that first attracted the outside world to our shores. But it is safe to say, that millions of dollars worth of furs of the finest quality obtainable are exported annually from our Northwest Territories. Furs constitute the main available resource, and capturing fur-bearing animals is the occupation of practically the entire population of those territories at the present time.

Government

Control of North-
west Fur Trade

In an address which I gave before the Commission of Conservation two years ago on the "Conservation of our Northern Fur Resources," I pointed out that the Danish Government administers the fur trade of Greenland as a government monopoly, and has thus been able to exercise a great degree of control, with a view to ensuring the conservation of the fur resources, and, what is of still more vital importance, the conservation of the health of the natives by protection from foreign traders. So far as I have been able to ascertain, this policy has met with success. Why should not a similar policy succeed when applied to our Northwest Territories? The policy of state ownership of public utilities has its adherents and opponents, but the state ownership of natural resources is not in the same category, and the state ownership of certain resources, such as forests, has undoubtedly proved successful, from both the point of view of conservation and of revenue. A discussion of this subject in these introductory remarks would be out of place and I have enlarged upon it elsewhere. It is desirable, however, that all who are interested in the conservation of our wild life, and particularly the fur-bearing and game animals, should consider the suggestion that these wild life resources in the Northwest Territories might be administered as a government monopoly, and for three reasons: First, as a means of securing adequate protection for these resources; second, as a source of revenue; and, third, in order to safeguard the native population, which is dependent upon and is the chief means of harvesting the crop.

Reservations and Sanctuaries

In addition to the protection of wild life in the Northwest Territories and Yukon and of migratory birds under the international treaty, the Dominion Government is actively conserving the wild life in another direction, namely, by the establishment of natural reservations under the Dominion Parks Act. The wild life in all the national parks is protected, and these parks comprise an area of nearly 9,000 square miles. But certain parks, such as the Wainwright Buffalo park, the Foremost Antelope reserve and Elk Island park, are maintained solely for the conservation of native mammals that would otherwise

have been exterminated. The Commissioner of Dominion Parks, who is also charged with the enforcement of the Northwest Game Act and Migratory Birds Convention Act, will, no doubt, give further details regarding these Dominion game and wild life reserves, when he opens the discussion on game sanctuaries, which is one of the subjects that it is desirable to consider at this conference.

In the establishment and maintenance of wild life or game reserves in Canada there are unlimited opportunities for co-operative action between the Dominion and Provincial governments. In fact, the reserves in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta are co-operative in character, inasmuch as such reserves are chiefly established by the Provincial governments in Dominion forest reserves. We feel, however, that closer co-operation is both desirable and possible, particularly in the matter of the appointment of wardens for such reserves. A wild life reserve fails in its object to a very large extent unless it is adequately patrolled; there are law-breakers everywhere, both white and Indian, and, if a reserve lacks sufficient protection, it will be a reserve in little more than name. The wild life inhabitants of a reserve must receive protection, both from human enemies and from the predatory animals that will be attracted to such a district providing more abundant food.

Effects of
Conservation
on Natives

In the conservation of our wild life one of the chief factors we have to consider is the native, whether he be Indian or Eskimo. His attitude towards the subject is naturally different from ours, and he affords a problem that demands sympathetic treatment and careful consideration. The Deputy Minister of the Department of Indian Affairs is a member of our Advisory Board on Wild Life Protection, and, in consequence, it is possible for us to give the fullest consideration to questions arising out of the relations of natives to our wild life and to take such action as may be deemed necessary and advisable. As this question will be discussed during the present session of the conference it is unnecessary to say more in this introductory statement than to point out that it affords, perhaps more than any other question, opportunities for co-operation between the Dominion and Provincial governments, and one of our desires is that this meeting and our free discussion will result in a greater degree of mutual understanding and co-operation in dealing with the problem of the Indian in the future.

In the foregoing remarks, government activities in the conservation of wild life have been chiefly considered. But, unfortunately, governments are more apt to follow than to lead public opinion in

questions of this nature. Consequently, the creation of a strong public opinion on the necessity of conserving our wild life is essential. It is essential, not only from the point of view of promoting the ends we have in view, but also in order to carry out effectually such measures as may be established.

**Educating
Public Opinion** The Commission of Conservation has taken the lead in educating public opinion in Canada as to the importance of conserving our wild life resources and in promoting measures to effect such conservation. The work that has already been accomplished has only served to indicate how much greater an effort is necessary. The assistance of all organizations concerned in the protection of wild life is essential. In a country so rich in game animals, it is surprising how few associations there are of those interested in the protection of such animals. There are a few associations of sportsmen scattered through the Dominion, but how many of these ever endeavour actively to promote wild life conservation or exert themselves except when their immediate interests are involved? Such associations of sportsmen should become active centres of propaganda for wild life conservation, not confining themselves to merely selfish interests, but dealing with the subject in a broad, public-spirited manner. Further, we should like to see associations of persons interested in wild life conservation, both sportsmen and nature-lovers, organized throughout the country. The effect of such organizations would be incalculable. Not only would they serve to educate the public, but they would be able to assist the governments in the effectual enforcement of the game laws. Where we now have one game protective or sportsmen's association, there should be at least ten. The possibilities of mutual co-operation between such associations and the governments are indefinite. In no way could an endeavour to promote nation-wide effort in the conservation of wild life meet with greater success than through the assistance of such organizations of sportsmen, of guides and of nature-lovers—in a word, of all who are directly interested in the adoption and carrying out of all measures that have for their object the preservation of our wild life resources.

**Need of
Nation-wide
Effort** Time will not permit a further review of the various directions in which our fur-bearing and game animals and wild life generally may be more successfully conserved by co-operative effort, not only between governments but between organizations and governments. The need of such nation-wide effort was never so pressing as it is to-day. We shall never again have such an excellent opportunity of attaining, by mutual

effort, the ends for which we are individually striving, as we have now. Everywhere ideas are in a state of flux, and the extent to which they crystallize out in forms that will promote the welfare of the country as a whole will depend upon the justice of the cause, the weight of public opinion behind it, and the prescience of our governments. A great responsibility rests upon those of us who are endeavouring to form and guide public opinion, and, at the same time, are called upon to advise on the conservation of this and other resources, but we can discharge our obligations with a greater degree of success if we work together with the same ends in view, and, instead of limiting our vision by regarding our problems as local, make our cause a national one.

